

INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY Hong Kong/USSR

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SUBJECT Activities of Soviet
Seamen in Hong Kong

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1. Strict discipline is maintained on Soviet merchant vessels. The Political Commissar (POLITKOM), who may be any one of the deck officers or engineers,* exercises control over matters concerning such things as Party discipline or the morale of the crew. The POLITKOM is appointed by the Political Section of the main shipping office in the port of the vessel's registry. He is selected from among the Communist Party members, and is usually the man with the best record and reputation.
 2. The seamen's certificates are held by the Captain.
 3. When a Soviet merchant vessel is in Hong Kong, the crew are allowed shore leave during their off-duty hours, but must be back on board before dark. They are allowed to visit cinemas but not public bars or restaurants.** Groups of men going ashore are arranged by the POLITKOM, who arranges that each group will contain one of his own men who will report in detail on the conduct of the group ashore. The representatives of the POLITKOM may or may not be known to the other members of the crew. They are selected by the POLITKOM and induced to spy upon their fellow seamen by promises of rewards or promotion, or by the remission of punishment for some default of their own. The shore leave of crew members is curtailed by the necessity of returning to the ship for meals.
 4. The visit of any outsider to a Soviet vessel in Hong Kong is most unwelcome. Journalists are especially unwelcome.
 5. Soviet seamen going ashore in Hong Kong are allowed to draw their full pay in local currency at the official rate of exchange. Formerly, they were permitted to draw only a percentage of their accrued pay in a foreign port, an arrangement which gave rise to so much trouble and so many arguments that the regulation was changed. A seaman's pay is 500 rubles per month; for seamen on a foreign voyage the monthly wage is paid on the basis of an artificial "marine rate of exchange" and amounts to US \$25. On the same basis, the Captain receives US \$100 per month. The money is paid by the local agents, Wallen and Company in Hong Kong, on the instructions of the

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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local Eksportkholeb representative, at the request of the Master of the vessel.

6. Soviet seamen on shore leave generally buy such merchandise as cheap articles of clothing, underwear, razors and razor blades, as well as inexpensive items of women's apparel, stockings, and the like. The last mentioned articles are possibly purchased with the intent of smuggling. However, when a vessel returns to a port in the USSR, the seamen are subjected to strict customs examinations and are unable to smuggle in any quantity of their foreign purchases. heavy duties are levied on foreign articles found in the possession of seamen returning from a foreign voyage.
7. Soviet merchant ships in Hong Kong are permitted to buy provisions as required, within certain limits set by regulations. Accounts of all such transactions are subject to inspection on the vessel's return to a Russian port.
8. Radio messages are occasionally sent from Soviet ships in Hong Kong.
9. Soviet officers of ships on the regular North Korea-Hong Kong run, with mixed Russian-Korean crews, appear to be better paid and less restricted in their movements ashore than are the officers of other Soviet ships. They frequent restaurants and cinemas, and are noticeably better dressed than their colleagues. It is said, however, that their greater privileges make the majority of them no happier, for they know that their protracted absence abroad will render them suspect and subject to a rigorous examination, as to their views and activities, on their return to the USSR.

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Comment. the POLITKOM was usually the Chief Mate. In December 1947, the POLITKOM on the SS CHITA was the Chief Engineer.

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Comment. Officers of Soviet merchant vessels occasionally visit restaurants in Hong Kong. They have been seen in the Cock and Pullet Restaurant, Duddell Street.

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